

Remarks of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
National Association of Community Health Centers
Healthcare Leadership Reception
To Be Recorded on March 13, 2014

It is a great honor to receive your Lifetime Achievement Award.

I'm sorry that I am unable to join you at this evening's reception. But I'm pleased that today's technology makes it possible for me to convey my sincere thanks for this recognition and add my voice to the celebration of the nation's health centers.

I would also like to acknowledge Representative Dingell and Senator Harkin -- who, I understand -- are also being honored by your organization for their leadership on health center issues.

Health centers help ensure that the most vulnerable among us have access to care. Health centers deliver quality and cost-effective care to tens of millions of patients nationwide – serving more than three million patients in California alone.

I first ran for office because I believe government can be a force for good in people's lives. I have held this view throughout my career in Congress. We know that special interests have advocates in Washington. It is the poor, the sick, and the powerless who need a champion in Congress. And that is what I have strived to be.

This guiding principle is precisely why I have been so invested in health centers and have worked to further your mission for so many years.

Since I addressed health center advocates last year, health centers around the country have been playing an important role in making implementation of the Affordable Care Act a success.

You are assisting with efforts to help uninsured Americans gain affordable insurance coverage.

And you are preparing to be the health home for so many who will gain insurance coverage and will need a place to go to receive primary care services.

In fact, President Obama's recent budget proposal recognizes the vital role of health centers by proposing continued, dedicated funding for the program over the next few years.

We have been able to do much to help health centers and the populations your centers serve. We have strengthened Medicaid, created and extended the Children's Health Insurance Program, and devoted mandatory funding to health center expansion – just to name our major accomplishments. But with millions of individuals lacking a regular source of care, our work is far from done.

So I would like to take this opportunity to highlight a few ways in which I believe health center advocates -- gathered today in Washington -- can keep advancing our shared goal of expanded access to affordable health care.

First, I urge you to continue the bipartisan tradition that has resulted in such strong Congressional support for the Health Centers Program over the years. Maintaining the support of current champions -- and recruiting new allies -- will be even more critical with the ongoing budget debates and funding constraints we face.

Second, we need your sustained commitment to help make certain the promise of health insurance for more than 25 million uninsured Americans translates to meaningful access. And we need your help in serving those who will remain in need of care. Regrettably, some states are making the political choice not to expand their Medicaid programs. This is particularly concerning for the very individuals health centers serve. I am confident that more and more states that have not yet expanded their Medicaid programs will do so in the coming months. But until they do, low-income and underserved populations will rely even more heavily on health centers to access health services.

Third, I want to emphasize the importance of your coming to Washington and contacting your representatives and senators about the ongoing need for safety net providers like health centers. You help policymakers from both parties understand what's at stake in funding and health reform implementation efforts.

Of course, as you undertake these things, I am committed to being there with you.

I will continue to advocate for health center funding – through the annual appropriations process and by extending the mandatory funding stream established in the Affordable Care Act.

I will stand firm on protecting and strengthening the Medicaid program.

And I will keep working to ensure that health centers are recognized as essential community providers in marketplace plans and appropriately reimbursed for services.

Thank you once again for this honor. And for standing with me as a voice for the millions who so urgently need it.